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Legislature sends groundbreaking water protection plan to governor

LANSING –Legislation that would provide groundbreaking comprehensive plans to protect Michigan’s waters was sent to the governor today, said Sen. Jud Gilbert, R-Algonac.

“We have kept our commitment to protecting Michigan’s waters and protecting companies who rely on water for their livelihood by reaching a sensible compromise,” Gilbert said. “It is essential to the future of our state to continue allowing water to be used in manufacturing, farming and other daily operations while ensuring the waters themselves are kept usable for swimmers, fishers and other recreational users.”

Senate Bills 850-852, 854 and 857 create new standards for water withdrawals and permit programs for water users to help them avoid adverse impacts on the environment.

The package will:

- Strengthen the current prohibition against water diversion by requiring legislative oversight;
- Put in place a system to manage significant new water withdrawals that have the potential to impact our water and water-dependent natural resources;
- Implement an interim standard that will provide protections for key designated trout streams by defining critical zones around the streams;
- Develop an easy-to-use model to replace the interim standard that will allow a user to click on a map and determine if water use will cause an adverse impact;
- Establish a permitting program for water bottling operations. This will ensure waters used for this purpose do not impact our water dependent natural resources;
- Authorize the creation of groups of water users to work with the DEQ in crafting water plans that resolve water use problems before adverse impacts occur; and
- Require businesses that use our water to propose water use conservation measures.

(More)

The Great Lakes Task Force, chaired by Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema, studied the issues surrounding Michigan's water resources and issued its final report in 2002. In the report's executive summary, it was noted, "The Great Lakes define the state of Michigan and its people. We live, work, and recreate on and around the lakes, and the care and safeguarding of this critical natural resource has been an ongoing responsibility for all the citizens of the state."

Sikkema, R-Wyoming, said that with today's legislation, another piece of the puzzle for protecting Michigan's waters is now complete.

"It is vital that we protect one of Michigan's greatest natural resources today, tomorrow and well into the future," Sikkema said. "This is good policy based on sound science that can help us achieve that goal."

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